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## The Social Bases of Political Cleavages in the Weimar Republic, 1919–1933 [1992]

Jürgen W. Falter\*

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**Abstract:** »Soziale Basis politischer Konfliktlinien in der Weimarer Republik, 1919–1933«. This article focuses on the divided and scattered political affiliations in the Weimar Republic which helped to provide an environment that supported rapid political changes between 1919 and 1933. Using methodologies of historical electoral research, this article considers cleavages between party blocs on a federal level by analyzing the stability within and voter fluctuation between political parties. These voter fluctuations are also analyzed by considering the social background of the eligible voters, as well as by religious denomination. An ecological regression analysis and aggregate data analysis determine the stability of voter blocs and note a number of reasons why the NSDAP received such a large number of votes from a rather stable voting system in March of 1933.

**Keywords:** Weimar Republic, political subcultures, political affiliations.

The research project that constitutes the basis of this essay proceeds from the assumption that because of distinct handicaps in Germany's political development there was "neither a homogeneous nor a dominant political culture" in the Weimar Republic<sup>1</sup> but rather – and this is particularly true for the period after 1928 – an extraordinarily "fateful fragmentation [of the political system] into a multiplicity of political subcultures."<sup>2</sup> The inability of these subcultures either to interact with each other or to establish social and political hegemony, in turn, contributed in no small measure to the rise of National Socialism. This essay uses the methodologies of historical electoral research to investigate the electoral strength of the most important of these political subcultures and to determine the changes that took place in their composition between 1919 and 1933.

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<sup>1</sup> Detlef Lehnert and Klaus Megerle, "Identitäts- und Konsensprobleme einer fragmentierten Gesellschaft. Zur Politischen Kultur der Weimarer Republik," in D. Berg-Schlosser and J. Schissler, eds., *Politische Kultur in Deutschland. Bilanz und Perspektiven der Forschung* (Opladen, 1987), 83.

<sup>2</sup> Idem, in idem, eds., *Politische Identität und nationale Gedenktage. Zur politischen Kultur der Weimarer Republik* (Opladen, 1989), 15.

It is first necessary to clarify certain assumptions regarding use of the term “political subculture.” In terms of the project as a whole, this concept has been used rather loosely. Together with the conceptually related, though not necessarily coterminous, notions of “political milieu” and “political camp,” the concept of “political subculture” is replete with variations and nuances. For the purposes of this investigation, the term refers to “groupings beneath the national level that on the basis of different factors (such as social structure, material interests, socialization, confessional identity, regional origin, etc.) display consistent orientations, articulate positions, and pursue courses of action with respect to central political questions and in common social life and can thus be identified in the political sphere as a collective.”<sup>3</sup>

This use of the term “political subculture” makes it possible to combine it with several closely related, though by no means theoretically equivalent, explanatory concepts of historical electoral research. The term “political camp,” for example, can be used in conjunction with Walter Dean Burnham’s theory of political confessionalism to explain the varying degrees of susceptibility that adherents of the various Weimar parties displayed toward National Socialism and to distinguish between (1) a Marxist camp consisting of the Social Democrats, the Independent Socialists, and the Communists, (2) a Catholic camp consisting of the Bavarian People’s Party (BVP) and the Center Party, (3) the camp of nonvoters, and (4) the ideologically fragmented bourgeois-Protestant camp with its plethora of individual political parties.<sup>4</sup> Whereas the Marxist and Catholic camps are both characterized by comprehensive world views that shape the behavior of their adherents and by the effective social integration of their members into a wide range of voluntary associations in the pre-political sphere, this cannot be said, according to Burnham, of the liberal, conservative, and interest-oriented bourgeois-Protestant parties. Like all attempts at historical typology, however, this approach forces the living and ideologically variegated kaleidoscope of Weimar party politics into a procrustean bed of fixed, oversimplified categories that can be justified only because they supposedly lead to a better understanding of the Nazis’ rise to power.

These camps – with the exception of that of the nonvoters, which was a conglomerate of the most diverse social groups – were organized along socio-political cleavages of profound secular importance. Borrowing from Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan, Franz Urban Pappi explains this as “the persistent potentials for conflict between the social-structural groupings of a society which, on account of its politicization, find expression in the electoral behav-

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>4</sup> See Walter Dean Burnham, “Political Immunization and Political Confessionalism: The United States and Weimar Germany,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 3 (1972): 1–30.

ior of these groupings.”<sup>5</sup> In this respect, it is possible to distinguish between two fundamental types of conflict that arose in connection with the national and industrial revolutions. The first of these expresses itself in conflicts over ethnic, territorial, and cultural questions; the second in conflicts of a social-economic and structural nature. Among the former are conflicts between established churches and the government or between dominant and subordinate cultures, whereas the latter types of conflict include those between the agricultural and industrial economic sectors or between workers and employers.<sup>6</sup>

During the Second Empire, when the socio-politically defined conflicts took place primarily at the local or regional level, these cleavages appear to have established themselves first and foremost, though not exclusively, in what M. Rainer Lepsius has called a “social-moral milieu.” To Lepsius, the term “social-moral milieu” refers to locally or regionally limited social entities “that are formed by the convergence of several structural dimensions such as religion, regional tradition, economic situation, cultural orientation, or stratum-specific composition of the intermediary groups.”<sup>7</sup> According to this view, parties constitute themselves as the political action committees of the different milieus. For the Second Empire and the Weimar Republic, Lepsius distinguishes between (1) the socialist worker and artisan milieu that was characterized, at least during the Second Empire, by the “negative integration of the working-class into a subculture” and that was “tied to specific class interests”; (2) the Catholic social milieu, which also constituted itself as a “political-social entity” according to the principle of negative integration; (3) the conservative milieu, with two distinct dimensions – the feudal-agrarian and the governmental-bourgeois – united by Protestantism; and (4) the bourgeois-Protestant milieu, which during the course of the Second Empire found itself reduced more and more “to a *Mittelstand* with a specific petty-bourgeois social morality.” For the most part, the four politically dominant social milieus were sharply separated from one another “by symbolically dramatized moral cleavages.”<sup>8</sup>

How do these three theoretical concepts relate to one another? And what sort of contribution do they have to make to the solution of our research problem? All of them share the analysis of the relationship between social structure

<sup>5</sup> Franz Urban Pappi, “Die konfessionell-religiöse Konfliktlinie in der deutschen Wählerschaft: Entstehung, Stabilität und Wandel,” in Dieter Oberndorfer, Hans Rattinger, and Karl Schmitt, eds., *Wirtschaftlicher Wandel, religiöser Wandel und Wertwandel. Folgen für das politische Verhalten in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Berlin, 1985), 264.

<sup>6</sup> See Franz Urban Pappi, “Sozialstruktur und politische Konflikte in der Bundesrepublik. Individual- und Kontextanalysen der Wahlentscheidung” (unpub. Habilitation thesis, University of Cologne, 1976), 85ff.

<sup>7</sup> M. Rainer Lepsius, “Parteiensystem und Sozialstruktur. Zum Problem der Demokratisierung der deutschen Gesellschaft,” in W. Abel et al., eds., *Wirtschaft, Geschichte und Wirtschaftsgeschichte. Festschrift zum 65. Geburtstag von F. Lütge* (Stuttgart, 1966), 383.

<sup>8</sup> See M. Rainer Lepsius, *Extremer Nationalismus. Strukturbedingungen vor der nationalsozialistischen Machtergreifung* (Stuttgart, 1966), 27ff.

and party system as a common point of departure. Burnham's notion of political camps and electoral coalitions, Lipset and Rokkan's theory of political cleavages, and Lepsius's concept of the social-moral milieu are all based upon what Pappi has called a "politicized social structure." But although neither the notion of the political camp nor that of political cleavage necessarily includes a territorial element in its definition – these can appear and function at the local as well as the national level – the concept of milieu implies the existence of a "great density of informal social relationships capable of providing the respective social group with a sense of common identity" that, for the most part, can be found only in a local or, at best, regional context.<sup>9</sup> The norms of the milieu are thus reproduced through direct social interaction, and the behavioral uniformity of political camps and cleavage groups may result from individual identification with the political goals and behavioral norms of specific reference groups in a way that, due to the absence of an existing opportunity structure, does not automatically entail the individual's daily, informal interaction with other members of that group. Using Burnham's notion of the political camp or the Lipset-Rokkan theory of political cleavage, it is thus possible to argue that the voting propensities of "diaspora Catholics" or workers living outside the typical proletarian milieu, will, in turn, resemble those of the men and women residing in Catholic strongholds or working-class neighborhoods.<sup>10</sup>

The concept of a social-moral milieu represents a theoretical improvement upon those two conceptions only in the event that the adherents of a particular milieu either possess an above-average, across-the-board probability of voting for the party of that specific milieu or at least manifest a distinctive and persistent pattern of voting behavior, such as a lesser tendency to switch parties. From a statistical point of view, the first of these two requirements means that the postulated effect of the milieu works not only cumulatively – that is, it does not reflect the accumulation of behavioral characteristics associated with membership in the milieu – but also involves a supplementary contextual and therefore multiplicative factor.<sup>11</sup> Otherwise, the concept of the social-moral milieu would, from the perspective of electoral history, be no more than a label for the local concentration of certain social characteristics that one could no doubt identify but that are inconsequential as determinants of electoral behavior. These concepts contribute to determining the strength and persistence of political subcultures in two ways. First, they offer different concept-specific perspectives of classification for the categorization of political subcultures. Second,

<sup>9</sup> Pappi, "Sozialstruktur und politische Konflikte," 617.

<sup>10</sup> A quotation may elucidate this point: "Persons who find themselves in the same class situation can choose the same party on the basis of individual interests without the existence of grouping influence." See Pappi, "Sozialstruktur und politische Konflikte," 500.

<sup>11</sup> The operational consequences of the second requirement are obvious.

they explicitly incorporate the sociostructural and sociocultural basis of subcultures into the analysis of political and electoral behavior.

The following empirical investigation focuses upon (1) the socialist labor movement in its two principal manifestations, (2) the Catholic camp, (3) the bourgeois voter coalition identified here as “liberal-minded” that was important at least at the beginning of the Weimar Republic, and (4) the initially predominantly rural but later increasingly urban German Nationalist electoral bloc, as well as (5) the National Socialists, whose growth after 1928 came, in the opinion of most observers, at the expense of the latter two electoral groups.<sup>12</sup> In this connection, the term “camp,” or *Lager*, refers exclusively to political constellations on the party and voter levels, without explicit reference to the underlying socio-structural and sociocultural voter coalitions. This essay employs ecological regression analysis to investigate fluctuations both between and within the individual subcultures in spite of possible stability on the part of the blocs themselves. Relying in large part upon the typology proposed by Burnham, this essay then addresses the structural cleavages – or, better said, the socio-structural correlates of the various political subcultures – whose social composition is determined with the help of ecological regression analysis.

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## Continuities and Discontinuities at the National Level

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During the Weimar Republic, there was a striking discrepancy between the proliferation of political parties and voter volatility, on the one hand, and a remarkable stability of individual electoral blocs, on the other. This stability could be seen as early as 1919, when these electoral blocs emerged relatively intact from military defeat, revolution, the humiliation of Versailles, and profound changes in both the franchise and the electoral system. What this suggests is that the Weimar electorate, in spite of the enormous volatility of electoral behavior, oriented itself, at least on the aggregate level, by socially and confessionally determined cleavages among the various party blocs. In the 1919 elections to the National Assembly, for example, parties belonging to the bourgeois-Protestant bloc were unable to sustain the position they had achieved in the 1912 Reichstag elections, whereas those that belonged to the political left managed to gain a substantial number of votes. This situation, however, lasted only until 1920, when the old balance of power among the three party blocs was reestablished in the first postwar Reichstag election. No substantial change in this distribution of votes was to occur prior to 1933.

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<sup>12</sup> The introduction of additional concepts such as electoral groups or electoral blocs comes about not through compulsive originality but rather in order not to assume theoretical definitions that should not be addressed here.

Just as party blocs remained stable in the transition from the Second Empire to the Weimar Republic, so did the individual parties. The 1919 elections reflected both a shift from national liberalism to left liberalism and heavy losses for the conservative groups, which had coalesced in one right-wing catchall party, the German National People's Party (*Deutschnationale Volkspartei* or DNVP). All of this, however, proved to be more or less transitory. By 1920 political conservatism had recaptured the position it had held in 1912, as first the political left and then the bourgeois-Protestant electoral bloc began to split their votes among numerous parties in a tendency that was to become even more pronounced over the course of the next several years before making the Weimar Republic ultimately ungovernable. In the meantime, the so-called Weimar Coalition consisting of the Social Democratic Party (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* or SPD), the left-liberal German Democratic Party (*Deutsche Demokratische Partei* or DDP), and the Catholic Center Party (*Deutsche Zentrumspartei*) had lost its electoral and parliamentary majority, whereas the political groups that opposed the Weimar Republic had already gained a slight majority. After July 1932, the extremist parties of the left and right, which were not merely opponents but bitter enemies of the Weimar Republic, possessed a majority in terms of both the popular vote and the seats they held in the Reichstag. This development left the parties of the Weimar Coalition with no alternative but to form extremely weak minority cabinets or to coalesce with groups that were not loyal supporters of the Weimar Republic for the entire period from the middle of 1920 to the collapse of parliamentary government at the beginning of the 1930s.

The development of the bourgeois-Protestant bloc was characterized by the steady decline of the two liberal parties until they virtually disappeared on the electoral level, first through the emergence and temporary success of diverse special interest parties that also played a major role in the decline of the DNVP and then, after 1928, through the meteoric rise of the NSDAP. On the left, extremist parties established themselves as serious rivals to the more moderate Social Democrats very early in the history of the Weimar Republic. In 1920 the extremist forces on the left were represented by the Independent Social Democratic Party (*Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* or USPD) and in 1932 by the Communist Party (*Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* or KPD), which at different points in the Weimar Republic succeeded in mobilizing nearly half of the leftist electorate. This, in turn, severely limited the political maneuverability of the Social Democrats throughout the Weimar Republic. Of the major electoral blocs that existed in the Weimar Republic, only the Catholic bloc experienced almost no significant shifts in power between the two main parties that formed it – the Center and the Bavarian People's Party (*Bayerische Volkspartei* or BVP) – in spite of occasional efforts on the part of dissident Catholic groups to break off and form their own parties (Table 1). For

all intents and purposes, the changes in party affiliation were much stronger within the bourgeois-Protestant bloc than within the left or the Catholic bloc.

In light of these shifts of strength within the bourgeois-Protestant bloc, most contemporary observers were convinced that the NSDAP's dramatic gains at the polls came both from predominantly middle-class adherents of the bourgeois-Protestant parties and from persons who had previously not voted or had just become eligible to vote for the first time. Followers of the two socialist parties and the Catholic bloc, on the other hand, were thought to be almost totally immune to Nazi electoral propaganda. In our discussion of Table 2, we will see that these conclusions may be valid as far as general tendencies are concerned but have to be modified considerably in the light of more recent empirical research.

In the aggregate, the socialist and Catholic blocs remained remarkably stable between 1920 and 1933. Throughout the history of the Weimar Republic, the SPD mobilized between 16 and 23 percent of the German electorate, and the Center and BVP received between 11 and 14 percent of the eligible voters. By contrast, the fluctuations in the level of support for the KPD – and here, for purposes of simplicity, we are including the USPD – were much greater, ranging from 7 to 15 percent. The same was true for the DNVP, which showed fluctuation between 5 and 16 percent, and most markedly for the two liberal parties, which fell from 17 to 2 percent.

**Table 1: The Electorate of the Weimar Parties, 1919-33 (Percentage of Eligible Voters)**

	Jan. 1919	June 1920	May 1924	Dec. 1924	May 1928	Sept. 1930	July 1932	Nov. 1932	March 1933
KPD	-	1.6	9.6	7.0	7.9	11.5	12.2	13.5	10.8
USPD	6.3	14.0	0.6	0.3	0.1	0.0	-	-	-
SPD	31.3	17.0	15.7	20.2	22.2	20.0	18.0	16.3	16.1
DDP	15.5	6.5	4.3	4.9	3.7	3.1	0.8	0.8	0.8
CENTER	13.2	10.7	10.2	10.6	9.0	9.6	10.4	9.5	9.9
BVP	3.1	3.3	2.5	2.9	2.3	2.5	3.1	2.7	2.4
DVP	3.7	10.9	7.0	7.8	6.5	3.9	1.0	1.5	1.0
DNVP	8.5	11.8	14.8	15.9	10.9	5.7	5.2	7.1	7.0
NSDAP	-	-	5.0	2.3	2.0	14.9	31.2	26.5	38.7
OTHER	1.3	2.6	6.6	5.8	10.4	11.1	1.7	2.1	1.4
Turnout	83.0	79.2	77.4	78.8	75.6	82.0	84.1	80.6	88.8

KPD	Communist Party
USPD	Independent Socialist Party
SPD	Social Democratic Party
DDP	German Democratic Party (left liberal)
CENTER	Catholic Center Party
BVP	Bavarian People's Party (Catholic)
DVP	German People's Party (national liberal)
DNVP	German Nation People's Party (right wing, nationalistic)
OTHER	All other parties combined



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## Reconstructing the "Real" Gains and Losses of the Political Blocs Between 1920 and 1933

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The preceding section outlined the net fluctuations between the different political camps. These fluctuations reveal a general swing behind which significantly greater subterranean shifts in voting behavior are sometimes concealed. Since each election result reflects the gains and losses of the various parties within each bloc, it might in an extreme case be possible for two equally strong parties to exchange their electorates completely without this ever showing up in the final vote. Survey data show that even in the case of sharp electoral shifts the fluctuations between two parties are often reciprocal, though occasionally strongly asymmetric. This suggests not only a flow of voters from the losing to the winning party but also a much smaller flow in the opposite direction. It is extremely improbable that voter fluctuations were different during the Weimar Republic. Unfortunately, this aspect of voter fluctuations has been overlooked by most historical accounts of Weimar elections.

The following analysis therefore attempts, as a first step, to reconstruct the real voter movement between the different political subcultures. This reconstruction is based on estimates obtained by a method known as "ecological regression analysis." If and only if the relatively strict assumptions of this technique are met by the data will the estimates represent a true measure of the voter movement that actually occurred. If the data cannot satisfy these assumptions, they may still be regarded as the statistically best indicators of the voter exchange that took place between the individual subcultures and parties.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> To my knowledge, the statistical technique of ecological regression analysis was first developed by the German statistician F. Bernstein as early as 1932, but his work has escaped the attention of most empirical researchers. The instrument was subsequently rediscovered by Leo Goodman in his article "Ecological Regressions and Behavior of Individuals," *American Sociological Review* 43 (1953): 557-72. The results or estimates displayed in Table 2 were calculated on the basis of a certain modification of this technique developed by Jan-Bernd Lohmöller that tries to cope with the effect of so-called contextual variables. See Jan-Bernd Lohmöller, Jürgen W. Falter, Andreas Link, and Johann de Rijke, "Unemployment and the Rise of National Socialism: Contradicting Results from Different Regional Aggregations," in Peter Nijkamp, ed., *Measuring the Unmeasurable* (Dordrecht, Boston and Lancaster, 1985), 357-70. Unfortunately we are not able to determine from the available data if all the conditions of ecological regression analysis have been adequately satisfied. Furthermore, this technique is very sensitive to differing model specifications. Its results, therefore, should be interpreted quite cautiously and restricted to differences of magnitude, not to small percentage variations. Even then, the results should approximate what actually happened, since different model specifications and various multiple ecological regression analyses based on different aggregations produce approximately the same results, which in turn closely coincide in magnitude with normal multiple regression analyses using so-called change variables.

**Table 2: Voter Fluctuations between Political Subcultures and Parties**

Reichstag Election	20-24A	24A-B	24B-28	28-30	30-32A	32A-B	32B-33	$\bar{x}$
(a) Stability Rates for Each Pair of Elections <sup>a</sup>								
SPD/KPD	40	66	72	65	61	67	71	63
CENTER/BVP	50	70	55	66	65	63	74	63
DDP/DVP	30	66	45	31	6	15	12	29
DNVP	48	70	51	27	20	49	49	45
OTHER <sup>b</sup>	13	40	29	47	9	22	11	24
Bourgeois <sup>c</sup>	25	60	44	35	11	34	33	35
(b) Between Camp Voter Fluctuations <sup>a</sup>								
Socialist Camp	39	19	18	22	22	18	19	22
Catholic Camp	33	20	32	30	30	28	20	28
Bourgeois-Protest.	34	17	25	41	66	37	51	39
Bourgeois <sup>d</sup>	34	16	23	19	19	17	9	20
Nonvoters	42	43	22	50	43	19	59	40
(c) Voter Fluctuation to and from the NSDAP								
Column 1: From other Party to NSDAP; Column 2: From NSDAP to other Party								
SPD/KPD	13:0	4:20	3:22	15:21	21:4	10:8	15:3	16:9
CENTER/BVP	1:0	2:18	2:12	9:9	10:4	6:4	3:1	7:5
DDP/DVP	7:0	3:9	3:11	26:5	36:1	4:1	23:1	22:2
DNVP	8:0	2:29	1:10	31:3	33:5	0:3	34:3	25:4
OTHER <sup>b</sup>	7:0	3:7	3:18	11:13	49:0	11:1	33:0	26:4
Nonvoters	3:0	1:7	2:22	14:11	19:0	2:6	42:2	19:5
Bourgeois-Protestant Camp					23:7	41:2	4:2	32:3
(d) Net Fluctuations to the NSDAP (in percentage of total electorate)								$\Sigma$
SPD/KPD	.71	-.65	-.10	2.18	3.10	-.92	1.32	5.64
CENTER/BVP	.60	-.19	-.02	.90	.70	-.40	.12	1.71
DDP/DVP	1.26	-.44	.12	2.50	2.37	-.25	.19	5.75
DNVP	1.00	-.96	.02	3.35	1.23	-.93	1.57	5.28
OTHER <sup>b</sup>	.90	-.22	-.12	.96	5.40	.02	.99	7.93
Nonvoters	.53	-.14	.06	3.42	3.36	-1.52	7.68	13.57

Transition probabilities estimated by means of multiple ecological regression analysis; community-level data (1920-1930); county-level data (1930-1933). The data is from Jürgen W. Falter and Reinhard Zintl, "The Economic Crisis of the 1930s and the Nazi Vote," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 19 (1987/88): 55-85.

<sup>a</sup> Percentage of first election voters of respective party.

<sup>b</sup> Without NSDAP.

<sup>c</sup> DDP, DVP, DNVP and OTHER (without NSDAP).

<sup>d</sup> With NSDAP.

Table 2a reports the retention rate of the different political subcultures. This retention rate is the percentage of those in each political camp or subculture who voted in any two consecutive elections either for the same party or for another party belonging to the same bloc. It is no surprise that the socialist and Catholic blocs reflect the highest retention rates. From one election to the next, they managed to retain an average of two-thirds of their voters, a figure that is somewhat lower than that for the major parties of the Federal Republic. In contrast, the bourgeois-Protestant bloc had a relatively low retention rate for

the period after 1924. On average, only about one-third of those who belonged to the bourgeois-Protestant bloc voted for parties that represented this bloc in consecutive elections. As early as 1924, there was a clear decline in the retention rate within this bloc, with a second wave of defections discernible between September 1930 and July 1932. Within this group, the retention rates were especially low for the liberal parties and for the various special interest and regional parties. Despite noticeable fluctuations, the DNVP was able to retain a significantly larger share of its electorate between 1928 and July 1932 than the other parties of the bourgeois-Protestant bloc.

Table 2b displays the complementary phenomenon of shifts from one bloc to another. The socialist bloc showed the lowest rate of voter movement to other political blocs, followed closely by the Catholic bloc. If the NSDAP, however, is included in the bourgeois-Protestant bloc, as Burnham has suggested, the rate of voter movement away from this bloc is the lowest. In fact, Table 2c indicates that voter shifts between the liberals and the conservatives as well as other political blocs, on the one hand, and the NSDAP, on the other, are clear and indisputable. In July 1932, for example, over 40 percent of the voters who had supported bourgeois-Protestant parties in 1930 switched to the NSDAP, whereas only 2 percent of those who had voted for the NSDAP in 1930 supported other bourgeois-Protestant parties in July 1932.

Voter movement to the NSDAP, however, was not restricted to supporters of the bourgeois-Protestant bloc. There were also other strongly asymmetrical voter shifts between the other political blocs and the NSDAP after 1928. An analysis of net fluctuations to the NSDAP is provided in Table 2d. This table reveals not merely the relative but, more important, the absolute contributions of the individual subcultures to the electoral surge of the NSDAP. In looking at all consecutive elections in the Weimar Republic, it becomes clear that nonvoters, or those who had not taken part in the previous election, contributed by far the largest share of votes flowing to the Hitler movement, with almost 14 percent of the Nazi vote coming from this source. This phenomenon can be explained in large part as a consequence of the enormous mobilization of prior nonvoters for the NSDAP in the election of March 1933, the first after Hitler became chancellor. Former voters for the various special-interest and regional parties in the bourgeois-Protestant bloc were another particularly important source of Nazi electoral support. Even more surprising, however, is the fact that net voter fluctuation from the socialist bloc to the NSDAP was virtually as high in absolute numbers as that from the two liberal parties or the DNVP. Of course, this is attributable to the fact that the KPD and SPD together attracted many more voters than the two Catholic parties, the two liberal parties, or the Nationalists. Elsewhere I have shown that it was primarily former SPD voters

who flocked from the socialist bloc to the NSDAP after 1928.<sup>14</sup> By far the smallest net voter fluctuation to the NSDAP was manifested by the Catholic bloc.

For the most part, then, voters tended to switch parties within a given political bloc rather than move from one bloc to another. For the socialist and Catholic blocs, shifts within these blocs were about three times more prevalent than shifts from one bloc to another. One must, however, consider that, for Catholic voters, moving from one party to another implied a true change of political ideology or affiliation, whereas socialist voters could switch to ideologically neighboring or related parties with much greater ease. If one includes the NSDAP with the bourgeois-Protestant bloc, the same pattern holds true for this political bloc, namely, that switches within the bloc were much more frequent than moves from it to another bloc. If, however, one excludes the NSDAP from this bloc, as some historians have done, the evidence then shows that shortly after 1924 the two liberal parties had been almost totally decimated and the nationalist-conservative party, the DNVP, partly so by the defection of their supporters to the new catchall party of the bourgeois-Protestant bloc, the NSDAP. From the purely electoral perspective, it was the fragmentation of the bourgeois-Protestant bloc and the lack of an explicit, socially sanctioned voting norm that promoted the rise of National Socialism. In this regard, Burnham's theory of "political confessionalism" can be empirically verified by our data.

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## The Social Foundations of the Weimar Party System

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The political parties of the Weimar Republic were organized along cleavages that had been inherited from the Second Empire, if not earlier. These cleavages can best be described, as Arthur Stinchcombe has suggested, as lines of tension separating the different coalitions between party elites and specific social groups.<sup>15</sup> The existence of such cleavages can be established only if four conditions are met: first, the persistence of party organizations, particularly at the local level; second, recruitment of the same core electorate over an extended period of time; third, the existence of party-specific social value orientations

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<sup>14</sup> Jürgen W. Falter and Dirk Hänisch, "Die Anfälligkeit von Arbeitern gegenüber der NSDAP bei den Reichstagswahlen 1928 und 1933," *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 26 (1986): 179-216, Reprint in this HSR Supplement.

<sup>15</sup> Arthur Stinchcombe, "Social Structure and Politics," in Fred I. Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby, eds., *Handbook of Political Science*, vol. 3, Macropolitics (Reading, Mass., 1975), 557-620.

within the electorate; and last, continuity over time as far as the programs of the various political parties are concerned.<sup>16</sup>

For the Weimar Republic, it can be established that conditions one and four were met in spite of the fact that during the last years before 1933 almost all bourgeois-Protestant parties made significant changes in their party programs. Condition three cannot be analyzed by means of quantitative electoral analysis. Hence, this section concentrates on the issue of whether the political blocs in question were always able to mobilize the same core of voters or whether there were any important changes in the social composition of party electorates during the Weimar Republic.

In measuring the stability of political divisions, this section takes a close look at the stability of the denominational and class composition of party electorates between 1920 and 1933. Because of the inherent limitations of analyses based upon aggregate data, a two-step procedure is employed. First, we examine the social correlates of the political parties over time (Table 3). Then we utilize ecological regression analyses to determine the voting behavior of specific social classes and religious denominations (Tables 4 and 5). Although there are certain dramatic changes of magnitude, this analysis reveals almost no significant shifts in the socio-structural bases of the various political parties and blocs between 1920 and 1933.

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## Social Correlates and the Main Political Parties

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Table 3 presents the statistical association between selected social characteristics and the voting results of the various parties in the form of correlation coefficients. These coefficients range from +1.0 (which indicates a perfectly positive linear relationship between two variables) to – 1.0 (which represents a perfectly negative linear relationship between two variables). A relatively high coefficient, such as that between the share of blue-collar workers in the electorate and the KPD vote share after 1920, represents a strong statistical relationship between the two variables. This relationship must then be interpreted in the following way: During the Weimar Republic, on average, the percentage of the KPD vote tended to be higher when the share of blue-collar workers in the counties and cities was larger; conversely, the lower the percentage of blue-collar workers, the smaller the electoral chances of the KPD. An example of a negative correlation coefficient, on the other hand, is the fact that where the percentage of Catholics is higher, the SPD's share of the popular vote is correspondingly lower. Coefficients close to zero – all coefficients between  $\pm 0.10$

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<sup>16</sup> See Franz Urban Pappi, "Sozialstruktur, Gesellschaftliche Wertorientierungen und Wahlabsicht. Ergebnisse eines Zeitvergleichs des Deutschen Elektors 1953 und 1976," *Politische Vierteljahresschrift* 18 (1977): 196ff.

are considered close to zero – should be interpreted as statistical nonassociations. This is the case, for example, for the relationship between the percentage of blue-collar workers and the DVP vote. Even correlation coefficients ranging from  $\pm 0.10$  to  $\pm 0.20$  represent at best very small, substantially insignificant statistical associations. They should, therefore, be interpreted with great caution.

**Table 3:** Some Social Correlates of the Weimar Parties (Person's  $r \times 100$ )<sup>a</sup>

	1920	1928	1930	1932A	1933
<i>SPD % Catholic</i>	-48	-66	-66	-66	-62
% Blue-Collar	11	22	18	13	15
% Self Employed	-18	-44	-35	-41	-42
% White Collar	6	23	23	31	31
% Agrarian	-14	-39	-36	-44	-48
<i>KPD % Catholic</i>	-07	-25	-21	-17	-26
% Blue-Collar	29	59	66	71	69
% Self Employed	-26	-63	-68	-70	-69
% White Collar	8	29	30	27	32
% Agrarian	-19	-57	-62	-63	-68
<i>Z/BVP % Catholic</i>	92	92	93	93	93
% Blue-Collar	-16	-18	-24	-20	-14
% Self Employed	23	24	30	25	17
% White Collar	-20	-22	-25	-21	-16
% Agrarian	23	24	29	23	16
<i>DDP % Catholic</i>	-46	-47	-32	-35	-34
% Blue-Collar	-16	-15	-17	-15	-13
% Self Employed	8	-12	-1	$\pm 00$	-11
% White Collar	22	46	35	29	43
% Agrarian	-16	-39	-27	-22	-36
<i>DVP % Catholic</i>	-56	-50	-40	-28	-32
% Blue-Collar	-3	8	9	-5	20
% Self Employed	-26	-32	-35	-14	-23
% White Collar	39	41	39	35	40
% Agrarian	-37	-47	-45	-34	-44
<i>DNVP % Catholic</i>	-59	-43	-36	-47	-55
% Blue-Collar	-24	-22	-13	-21	-17
% Self Employed	39	12	-3	3	$\pm 00$
% White Collar	-37	-14	-2	2	7
% Agrarian	55	38	26	23	17
<i>NSDAP % Catholic</i>	-	-09	-53	-71	-55
% Blue-Collar	-	-13	-15	-36	-46
% Self Employed	-	11	9	46	59
% White Collar	-	5	-12	-42	-52
% Agrarian	-	-6	8	47	63

<sup>a</sup> Values from Jürgen W. Falter, Thomas Lindenberg, and Siegfried Schumann, *Wahlen und Abstimmungen in der Weimarer Republik* (Munich, 1986), 163-70. For the rubric "Catholics," bivariate correlation coefficient; all other rubrics, share of Catholics partialled out, that is, statistically controlled.

Table 3 displays two different types of correlation coefficients: normal bivariate coefficients without controls for third variables and partial correlation coefficients with a control for potentially disturbing factors such as the percentage of Catholics. Partial correlation coefficients should be interpreted as if the units of analysis, such as cities and counties, were more or less denominationally the same. This method controls for the factor of “religious denomination” when analyzing the influence of other social variables. Controlling the denominational factor in this manner is necessary because the confessional cleavage was by far the most important factor influencing Weimar voting behavior. Its influence was so important that the effect of other variables correlating with religious denomination is often virtually suppressed by it. Since in Weimar Germany the percentages of Catholics and Protestants were nearly perfectly negatively correlated – that is, a high percentage of Catholics always implied a low percentage of Protestants, and vice versa – one should not use partial correlation coefficients with controls for confession to determine the effect of religious denomination. In the case of the denominational variable, other potential influence factors are not statistically controlled. In the case of all other social variables, Table 3 deals with partial correlations with controls for the factor “Catholics.”

Table 3 reflects social characteristics that are of particular importance for the analysis of sociopolitical cleavages.<sup>17</sup> It clearly shows the influence of at least three political cleavages acting upon the Weimar party system. In the first place, religious denomination undoubtedly separates the two Catholic parties from the other four parties. Only in the case of the KPD is the relationship very weak. A second line of cleavage is represented by the two variables “blue-collar” and “self-employed.” In districts with more blue-collar workers and fewer self-employed persons than average, the share of the KPD vote and, to a somewhat lesser degree, that of the SPD are higher than average, whereas the shares of the other parties fall below their national mean. A third line of cleavage is represented at its positive pole by the percentage of the population working in the agrarian sector of the economy and at its negative pole by the percentage of white-collar workers and civil servants. In general, the DNVP in Protestant areas and the Center Party and BVP to a significantly lesser extent in Catholic areas were much more successful in mobilizing voters between 1928 and 1933 wherever the percentage of those employed in the agrarian sector was higher than the national average. On the other hand, both the two socialist and the two liberal parties were significantly weaker than in the rest of the country in those areas that were predominantly agrarian in terms of their social and economic structures. Last, there was a fourth cleavage representing regional

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<sup>17</sup> For further social correlates of the party vote in Weimar Germany, see *ibid.*

and ethnic conflicts, but this was of only minor importance in the Weimar Republic and is not discussed here.

It is clear that the confessional cleavage remained of major importance for the two Catholic parties until the very end of the Weimar Republic. The same is true in substance for the two socialist parties, especially for the SPD, and for the DNVP, all of which were clearly rooted in Protestant regions. Only for the two liberal parties, which virtually disappeared from the political stage between 1928 and 1932, did the confessional cleavage seem to lose importance after 1928. The same is true of the second cleavage, which was represented by the share of blue-collar workers in the general population. During the course of the Great Depression, however, a further line of division demarcated by the unemployment rate arose within the blue-collar sector. According to the correlation coefficients in Table 3, this new division promoted the growth of the KPD, which more and more became the party of the unemployed.<sup>18</sup> Finally, with regard to the third cleavage based upon the percentage of people employed in the agricultural sector, there was only a relatively minor change as far as most parties were concerned. Only the DNVP seems to have lost its strong social basis in the rural Protestant regions of Germany. The principal beneficiary of the DNVP's decline after 1930 seems to have been the NSDAP, whose electoral success in 1932 and 1933 was higher on average in those areas where the share of the Protestant rural population was high.

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## Party Affiliation and Social Groups

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The coefficients in Table 3, as well as the interpretations based upon them, are not only derived from aggregate data but are restricted to the aggregate level. That is to say, the preceding section discusses only relationships between variables that existed at the level of the thousand or so counties throughout Germany in the Weimar Republic. The hypotheses in question, however, relate to the level of the individual. Such questions can only be answered on the basis of individual data, that is, information that is not collected at the level of the counties or cities but at the level of the individual voters. Once again, evidence restricts analysis to the extrapolation about individual voting behavior through the interpretation of aggregate data by means of multiple ecological regression analysis. Table 4 depicts the results of two such ecological regression analyses for three Reichstag elections. The starting point is the May 1924 election, because this was the first time that the NSDAP competed at the national level as a

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<sup>18</sup> See Jürgen W. Falter, "Unemployment and the Radicalisation of the German Electorate 1928-1933: An Aggregate Data Analysis with Special Emphasis on the Rise of National Socialism," in Peter Stachura, ed., *Unemployment and the Great Depression in Weimar Germany* (Basingstoke and London, 1986), 187-208.



junior partner of a *völkisch* coalition. Furthermore, the bipolar competition on the left between the SPD and the KPD took shape in this election. The second election under consideration is the Reichstag election of 1928, which may be regarded as the last normal election before the start of the Great Depression and the subsequent sudden rise of National Socialism from a right-wing extremist splinter group to the strongest party in Germany. Finally, the July 1932 Reichstag election was chosen because in this election the NSDAP managed to win the highest share of the popular vote in a truly free election and emerged as by far the strongest party in the Reichstag.

The percentages reported in Table 4 depict the probabilities of a Catholic and a non-Catholic or a member of the three social classes voting for one of the indicated parties at the three elections. Again, interpretation should be restricted to global orders of magnitude and should avoid over-interpreting small percentage differences.<sup>19</sup> Even then, the confessional cleavage proves to have been extraordinarily durable, with Catholicism being a positive predictor for support for the Center Party and the BVP and negative for the SPD, the liberals, and the DNVP. Only for the KPD electorate does Catholic confessional identity seem to have been of minor importance.<sup>20</sup> After 1928, the NSDAP was also a predominantly Protestant party that received disproportionately fewer Catholic votes. The data show that about 40 percent of all eligible Catholic voters opted for one of the two Catholic parties. Non-Catholics, on the other hand, gave almost no support to the Center Party and the BVP.<sup>21</sup> In contrast, only 10 percent of the Catholics, but almost 30 percent of the non-Catholics voted in 1928 for parties of the bourgeois-Protestant bloc.

The blue-collar vote also proved rather stable. About 40 to 45 percent of the eligible blue-collar workers seem to have voted in 1924 and 1932 for one of the two socialist parties; about 10 percent for the two Catholic parties; and between 20 and 30 percent for one of the bourgeois parties, by far mostly for the NSDAP after 1930. According to the data and the statistical results, blue-collar support for the NSDAP came not from the electoral supporters of the two par-

<sup>19</sup> According to the formal characteristics of our statistical estimators, the results for the variable "confession" are probably better than those for the variable "social class." Thus there are no estimators for the confessional variables that are negative or higher than 100. On the other hand, some estimators for social class are negative in sign. They were smoothed by means of proportional fitting. For technical details, see Jan-Bernd Lohmöller, et al., "Unemployment and the Rise of National Socialism," in Peter Nijkamp, ed., *Measuring the Unmeasurable* (Dordrecht, 1985), 357–70.

<sup>20</sup> Here it is important to bear in mind that being a member of the Catholic church did not, at least in Germany, imply being a practicing Catholic.

<sup>21</sup> The figure of 40 percent is quite a high mobilization rate, since the social characteristic "Catholic" contains both practicing and nominal Catholics. Furthermore, we are reporting as dependent variables the party vote as well as nonvoting. For analogous estimates, see the contemporary source Johannes Schauf, *Die deutschen Katholiken und die Zentrumspartei. Eine politisch-statistische Untersuchung der Reichstagswahlen seit 1871* (Cologne, 1928).

ties of the labor movement but mainly from former voters for the bourgeois-Protestant bloc and from nonvoters.<sup>22</sup>

Table 4: The Party Vote of Major Social Groups

	Confession		Social Class		
	Catholic	Other	Blue Coll.	White Coll.	Self-Empl.
<i>SPD</i>					
1924A	5	21	21	16	7
1928	9	28	31	24	7
1932A	6	23	22	24	7
<i>KPD</i>					
1924A	9	10	19	5	0
1928	5	9	14	5	0
1932A	10	13	23	6	0
<i>Z/BVP</i>					
1924A	43	2	9	9	27
1928	37	0	10	8	17
1932A	42	0	11	10	20
<i>DDP/DVP</i>					
1924A	3	15	8	18	12
1928	4	13	6	17	11
1932A	1	2	1	3	2
<i>DNVP</i>					
1924A	3	21	13	14	18
1928	4	14	9	10	13
1932A	2	6	4	6	6
<i>NSDAP</i>					
1924A	3	6	4	7	6
1928	2	2	2	2	2
1932A	16	38	25	29	42

Column percentages estimated by means of multiple ecological regression analysis. The empirical basis was the election results in 865 county units. See Jürgen W. Falter and Reinhard Zintl, "The Economic Crisis of the 1930's and the Nazi Vote," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 19 (1987/88): 55-85.

Reading example: In May 1924, about 5 percent of the eligible Catholics and 21 percent of the non-Catholic population voted SPD.

The two socialist parties attracted relatively few votes from the old middle class, self-employed artisans and shopkeepers, and the farming population. A relatively high percentage of the self-employed seemed to have voted for the Center or the BVP, whereas the Protestant members of the old middle class spread their vote among the various parties of the bourgeois-Protestant bloc.

<sup>22</sup> In interpreting these estimates, one should take into consideration the fact that the blue-collar category of the official Weimar statistics comprised not only industrial laborers but also workers from the agrarian and tertiary sectors who, as I have shown elsewhere, showed a much lower affinity for the socialist parties but seem to have voted more strongly in favor of National Socialism than the true blue-collar workers. See Jürgen W. Falter, *Hitlers Wähler* (Munich, 1991), ch. 7.

After 1930, the old middle class switched heavily to the NSDAP. From the perspective of the political blocs, the voting behavior of the old middle class followed traditional political cleavages more closely than that of blue-collar workers.

In contrast to the old middle class, the voting behavior of the new middle class of white-collar employees and civil servants was much more differentiated and less directed by historical political divisions. Between 20 and 30 percent of those voters who belonged to the so-called new middle class opted regularly for one of the two left parties. After 1928 the SPD seems to have received more support from this stratum of society than from the blue-collar electorate. About 40 percent of civil servants and white-collar employees voted for the parties of the bourgeois-Protestant bloc. After July 1932, the NSDAP collected the splinters of this group, although support from the new middle class remained much lower than that from the old middle class.

To summarize, the evidence of individual voter preferences shows that basic historical divisions of the German electorate characterized the electoral behavior of the various social strata and religious groups right up to the end of the Weimar Republic. The changes that took place occurred mainly within the bourgeois-Protestant bloc. It is important to note that no single political bloc was able to mobilize all or even an absolute majority of the members of one social class or confession for its own purposes. Only within the old middle class did a majority vote for one of the parties of the bourgeois-Protestant bloc after 1930. The NSDAP succeeded in winning more partisans from this social stratum or class than from any other social group.

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## The Social Composition of Party Electorates

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By examining the social composition of the voters for the various political parties rather than the tendency of the members of various social groups to identify themselves with those parties, it is possible once again to address the effect of the confessional cleavage: The Center party and its Bavarian counterpart recruited almost all of their voters from the Catholic sector of the population. In the other political blocs, with the exception first of the Communists and later of the National Socialists, Catholic voters represented an insignificant minority of the party electorates (Table 5). This pattern changed very little during the Weimar Republic. On the other hand, the division between blue-collar workers and self-employed persons is clearly visible. Particularly the KPD seems to have been a clearly class-based blue-collar party, despite having a small white-collar following. The SPD constituency, however, was much more mixed: More than a third – and after 1930 more than 40 percent – of those who voted for the Social Democrats seem to have come from a middle-class background, analogous to the social composition of the SPD members.

The other parties, especially the two liberal groups, recruited their voters from astonishingly equal proportions of blue-collar, white-collar, and self-employed voters. Both the DNVP and the NSDAP, on the other hand, had a surprisingly high share of blue-collar voters among their followers. Even here, however, the changes between 1924 and 1932 were of only minor importance. We may therefore concur with the thesis of Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan that the political landscape of the Weimar Republic is characterized by the pronounced persistence of recruitment of voters from the same core clientele.

**Table 5: The Social Composition of the Weimar Party Electorates**

	Confession		Social Class		
	Catholic	Other	Blue Coll.	White Coll.	Self-Empl.
<i>SPD</i>					
1924A	9	91	65	21	14
1928	13	87	65	21	13
1932A	12	88	57	28	15
<i>KPD</i>					
1924A	29	71	85	12	3
1928	21	79	76	16	8
1932A	28	72	81	13	6
<i>Z/BVP</i>					
1924A	93	7	30	16	54
1928	100	0	40	18	41
1932A	99	1	38	18	43
<i>DDP/DVP</i>					
1924A	10	90	34	34	33
1928	13	87	33	33	33
1932A	12	88	33	30	37
<i>DNVP</i>					
1924A	6	94	41	19	39
1928	11	89	41	20	39
1932A	14	86	38	27	35
<i>NSDAP</i>					
1924A	20	80	39	27	35
1928	30	70	40	22	37
1932A	17	83	39	19	42

Row percentages estimated by means of multiple ecological regression analysis. Basis: 865 county units.

Reading example: In May 1924, about 90 percent of the SPD voters were non-Catholic, approximately two-third were blue-collar workers, 20 percent white-collar workers, etc.

## Conclusion

The goal of the preceding analysis has been to reconstruct through ecological regression analysis and aggregate data analysis the movement of voters between parties and political blocs during the Weimar Republic and to gain new insights into the political affiliations of the important social groups and, from a

complementary perspective, into the social composition of the electorates of Weimar parties. The pronounced stability of electoral blocs at the national level is confirmed by a corresponding pattern of individual voter fluctuations. A strong majority of all voter shifts during the Weimar Republic were movements within specific electoral blocs. If one considers the NSDAP as part of the bourgeois-Protestant bloc, then the average shift from one camp to another between elections amounted only to 20 to 30 percent, a figure rather close to modern fluctuation rates in the former Federal Republic of Germany. Fluctuations were significantly higher only among nonvoters, many of whom were in the process of switching parties and electoral blocs, and for the liberal and conservative parties, which in the first case was almost totally and in the second partially wiped out by the National Socialists.

Despite a high rate of stability for the various electoral blocs that existed in the Weimar Republic, a significant shift of voters from the different blocs to the NSDAP could be detected during the last Reichstag elections. Both relatively and absolutely, the parties of the bourgeois-Protestant bloc lost the most voters to the NSDAP, followed by the nonvoters and the socialist bloc. Almost half of the NSDAP electorate of March 1933 had voted for one of the various parties of the bourgeois-Protestant bloc, one-third came from nonvoters, and about 7 out of 100 came from the socialist bloc.

Similarly, the cleavage structure of the Weimar Republic proved to be rather stable. This was especially true for the confessional cleavage, which showed no significant variation at either the aggregate or the individual level between 1920 and 1933. The effect of the second cleavage, between blue-collar workers and the self-employed, was similar. Almost none of the self-employed seem to have voted for the two socialist parties, which in turn recruited their support mainly from the blue-collar sector. On the other hand, all other political parties won an astonishingly high degree of blue-collar support. This is particularly striking with regard to the NSDAP electorate. It was socially much more heterogeneous than most contemporary sociologists and modern historians have thought. Contrary to many expectations, the SPD also seems to have been socially heterogeneous. In this respect, the social composition of its electorate more or less mirrored that of its party membership. At the end of the Weimar Republic, the KPD was the only proletarian party with strong backing from unemployed voters.

In contrast to the old middle class, the electoral behavior of the new middle class was quite differentiated and less clear-cut than has been presumed by many contemporaries and historians. Within the NSDAP electorate, the new middle class did not form a majority. It might even have been underrepresented. The non-Catholic self-employed, mostly from an agrarian background, voted largely for the National Socialists from 1930 on. Within the bourgeois-Protestant bloc, the NSDAP constituted a kind of functional equivalent as the representative of the formerly liberal, conservative, and special interest-

oriented groups. More than any other party of its time, it was a force that transcended the cleavages that had become so deeply embedded in the German electorate, a factor that helps to explain its enormous surge at the electoral level between 1928 and 1932.

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## Methodological Appendix: Data Base and Statistical Techniques

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*Data Base:* The empirical analysis in this essay is based on two data sets. The first was originally derived from the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) Weimar Election File.<sup>23</sup> The second data set, containing fewer variables but a greater number of cases, carries information on the 4,000 to 5,000 German communities with more than 2,000 inhabitants. It contains about 200 variables, mainly electoral data for all Reichstag elections between 1920 and 1933 (with the unfortunate exception of the two 1932 elections) and some valuable social, economic, and sociocultural information on the community level.<sup>24</sup>

Both data sets can be used for analytical purposes only if one adjusts the units for boundary changes, which occurred in Weimar Germany with considerable frequency. Since these boundary changes did not follow a random pattern but took place mainly in the more urbanized and economically active regions of the nation, serious distortions result if one does not neutralize their effect when creating county or community units that are stable over time. This restriction is often overlooked or treated in a rather cavalier fashion in the existing literature on the Nazi vote.<sup>25</sup> But without such adjustments, it is inadvisable to combine census and election data from different years. After the necessary adjustments, the number of cases in the county data set shrank by over 25 percent, from about 1,200 to 865. Problems created by boundary

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<sup>23</sup> Since the ICPSR Weimar Election File Data Set contains virtually thousands of minor and major errors, in the course of a large research project on the NSDAP voters we had to reconstruct our own county data set from scratch. For this purpose we used the relevant volumes of *Statistik des Deutschen Reiches* (Berlin, 1920-34) plus a multitude of other printed sources, such as unemployment statistics, fiscal reports, and so forth. The county data set now contains about 700 variables, among them some 200 to 300 containing information on all Weimar Reichstag and presidential elections plus the referenda on the expropriation of the former ruling princes (*Fürsteneignung*) and on the Young Plan concerning the payment of reparations. The rest of the variables are social, economic, and cultural indicators of the 1,200 counties of the Weimar Republic.

<sup>24</sup> The community data set is distributed by the Zentralarchiv für empirische Sozialforschung. [Today: GESIS – Leibniz-Institute for the Social Sciences, Unter Sachsenhausen 6-8, 50667 Cologne, Germany].

<sup>25</sup> Some examples are discussed in Jürgen Falter and Wolf D. Gruner, "Minor and Major Flaws of a Widely Used Data Set: The ICPSR 'German Weimar Republik Data 1919-1933' under Scrutiny," *Historical Social Research* 6 (1981) 4: 4-26.

changes are even more serious for community data files if one does not restrict the adjustment procedure to pairs of elections.<sup>26</sup>

*Research Techniques:* Most hypotheses on the Nazi electorate imply individual-level relations. This kind of information is not available for the Weimar period. The only data existing are aggregate data. As a result, we must rely on percentages of parties or social indicators that are available only on a county or community level. Using this information, we are able to specify, for example, that the NSDAP fared much better between 1930 and 1933 in Protestant than in Catholic counties, that there is a negative correlation between unemployment figures and the Nazi share of the vote, and that there is a strong association between the losses of the middle-class parties and the National Socialist vote gains. What we would like to know, however, is information such as the percentage of Catholics and non-Catholics voting NSDAP in 1930 and the share of unemployed blue-collar workers voting for Adolf Hitler between 1928 and 1933. The most common yet seldom applied statistical technique to infer individual-level data from aggregate data is ecological regression analysis.<sup>27</sup>

Our analysis, as far as the individual level is concerned, is based on this technique. Unfortunately, ecological regression analysis works only if the data meet some rather strong statistical assumptions. Some of these assumptions (the standard assumptions of regression analysis such as linearity) can be tested by means of aggregate data. Other assumptions, including those that permit inference from aggregate to individual-level relations, cannot be tested by aggregate data alone or can be tested only under very special circumstances. The most important of these special assumptions of ecological regression analysis is that the slope of the regression line of each pair of variables under consideration is the same between the individual units as it is between the aggregate units; that is, no systematic contextual effects are permitted. Only random variation around the regression line is acceptable. From empirical evidence, we know that the assumption of non-contextuality is unrealistic in many instances. Therefore, it seemed reasonable to control our regression equations for potentially disturbing factors such as confession or urbanization. We thus might be able to neutralize, at least in part, unwelcome nonlinearities. Our findings are based on such an extension of the classic ecological regression technique. Furthermore, we weighted each county unit by its number of eligible voters in order to control for extreme variations in population. Finally, we applied a proportional fitting procedure to any negative estimators that arose since nega-

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<sup>26</sup> For the same reason, the ecological regression analysis reported in Table 4 is based on such pairs of elections. The community data set, which in its raw form contains about 6,000 communities (all communities with 2,000 inhabitants or more plus the county-based means for all communities with fewer than 2,000 inhabitants), is thus reduced to about 4,000 community units.

<sup>27</sup> See Jan-Bernd Lohmöller and Jürgen W. Falter, "Some Further Aspects of Ecological Regression Analysis," *Quality and Quantity* 20 (1986): 109-25.

tive percentages do not exist in reality.<sup>28</sup> There is, however, no guarantee of the total elimination of bias from our findings. Our statistical approach is rational in that it is based on an explicitly statistical model and not simply on hindsight or on the straightforward inference from simple bivariate ecological correlations or aggregate level regressions to individual-level relations. This differentiates it from much of the existing research on the Nazi electorate.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Although the transition probabilities for the elections between 1920 and 1928 were calculated on the basis of our Weimar Community Data Set without the use of control variables, the 1928 to 1933 transition probabilities, as well as the voting propensities of the two confessions and the different social strata, were calculated on the basis of the 865 county units of our Weimar Republic County Data Set, using urbanization and religious denominations as control variables in order to neutralize possible contextual effects. For details, see Jan-Bernd Lohmöller et al., "Unemployment and the Rise of National Socialism: Contradicting Results from Different Regional Aggregations," in Peter Nijkamp, ed., *Measuring the Unmeasurable* (Boston, 1985), 357–70. Negative estimators or values above 100 were squeezed into the 0–100 percent interval by an iterative proportional fitting procedure.

<sup>29</sup> For those who feel uncomfortable with this methodology, some aggregate correlations and regression coefficients are reported in Jürgen W. Falter, "The National Socialist Mobilization of New Voters," in Thomas Childers, ed., *The Formation of the Nazi Constituency, 1919–1933* (London, 1986), 202–31; idem, "Der Aufstieg der NSDAP in Franken bei den Reichstagswahlen 1924–1933," *German Studies Review* 9 (1986): 293–318; and, most recently, idem, *Hitlers Wähler* (Munich, 1991).